

INTERVIEW WITH NOX ARCANA

by Josh Haney

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Since 2003 Joseph Vargo and William Piotrowski have been conjuring the darkest realms imaginable, created solely through their musical project Nox Arcana, Latin for mysteries of the night. Over the course of five albums they have created their own genre of gothic horror soundtracks, all the while amassing a loyal fanbase eager to let their collective minds eyes wander through the compositions that come from these two masters of morbid music.

I caught up with them via email, from their crypts in gloomy Ohio, where they were in the midst of working on their new album, *Blood Of The Dragon*, to ask them some questions about where they came from, who scares them, and what the future holds for Nox Arcana.

For those unfamiliar, how would you describe your music/vision?

Joseph: We create dark concept albums based on various gothic themes, or as we like to describe it "music from the shadows for creatures of the night." Our music is mainly classically based instrumental, although we do incorporate chanting choirs and spoken narratives for dramatic effect to achieve a blend of darkly haunting melodies that encompass the complete gothic spectrum—the romantic, the mysterious, and the horrific. We utilize a variety of instruments such as piano, pipe organ, violin, acoustic guitar, drums and tolling bells to achieve symphonic orchestrations. Our concept has always been to create moody and melody-driven gothic soundscapes that take the listener on a musical journey through various dark realms of fantasy.

Could you give us a brief history of how you got started? Who does what in the band?

Joseph: I began my career as a gothic fantasy artist, selling posters, t-shirts and calendars of my work through my own company, Monolith Graphics, and by 1997, I had established a large audience in the gothic realm. In 1998, I came up with the idea of doing a Halloween music CD that would sound like a soundtrack to a gothic horror movie. I branched out and began producing gothic soundtrack music with another band, but we parted ways after two albums. William and I were old friends and we formed Nox Arcana in 2003. He was very enthusiastic about the project and within a few weeks, we were in the studio working on the initial tracks for *Darklore Manor*.

We work on all of our music together, although I'm more of the composer and William is the better musician. I write the majority of the basic melodies then we work together to flesh them out to create more elaborate compositions. We mix every song together but William handles all the engineering and mastering. I develop the concepts and write the lyrics. I also create the artwork and work together with Christine Filipak to design the CD packaging.

How do you come up with your ideas?

William: A lot of our music has been inspired by Joseph's artwork. We have many of his paintings displayed on the walls in the studio and his artbook and magazines are always within reach as we are writing. With some of the albums we have drawn inspiration from other literary sources as well. For the *Necronomicon* album we turned to H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos, and as we were working on the *Transylvania* album, Bram Stoker's novel, *Dracula*, was a great source of inspiration.

Joseph: I love delving deep into the shadows of my own imagination. *Darklore Manor* was an original idea based on a legendary haunted house with a dark and sinister history. While we were working on

our fifth CD, *Carnival of Lost Souls*, we had fun creating an entirely original storyline for our audience. The main story deals with the creepy attractions of an old-time carnival that harbors living nightmares and horrific secrets. Our upcoming CD, *Blood of the Dragon*, takes listeners on a quest into a realm ruled by knights, dragons and dark sorcery. We both love this genre and we've created some really powerful *Conan*-inspired music for this new album.

Musically, who are your influences?

Joseph: Soundtrack composers like John Carpenter, Jerry Goldsmith, and Danny Elfman had a major influence on me early on. They made me appreciate dark instrumental music with their scores to *Halloween*, *The Omen*, *The 13th Warrior*, and *Edward Scissorhands*. I also have to tip my hat to Wojciech Kilar, who composed the fantastic score to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

What does horror mean to you?

Joseph: We generally stay within the realm of gothic horror with our musical themes. This is a dark and brooding nightmare world, filled with lots of moody imagery. Gargoyles, ghosts, supernatural creatures of the night, and anything set in a haunted mansion or ancient crypt. I love the old American International horror films that Roger Corman produced. They were just dripping with gothic atmosphere. I also love the writings of Edgar Allan Poe and H.P. Lovecraft.

When not creating music, what do you like to do?

Joseph: I also paint and write, so I'm usually creating some sort of gothic work. I find all creative outlets to be very relaxing, unless I'm under a really tight deadline. I also enjoy watching a good horror film. Unfortunately, there haven't been too many of those lately.

Films or books that mean a lot to you?

Joseph: William and I both love *The Crow*, *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, *The 13th Warrior*, and the entire *Lord of the Rings* Trilogy. John Carpenter's

Halloween is a truly creepy film with a terrific use of music. I also really love the French film *Brotherhood of the Wolf*. I've read all of Lovecraft's work several times. He has so many great stories, but some of my favorites are *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, and *The Dunwich Horror*.

What does the future hold for Nox Arcana?

William: Over this past summer we recorded an album with occult author Michelle Belanger. She has a beautiful operatic voice and she sang a song on our *Winter's Knight* album. We wrote and performed the music for her album, *Blood of Angels*, which will be out later this fall. In the meantime, we are wrapping up our sixth Nox Arcana CD, *Blood of the Dragon*, which centers around an epic sword and sorcery theme. We are also beginning to score some computer games and will eventually be creating our own in the future. We are currently working on creating the soundtrack for a game called *Inherent Evil 2*. We've also allowed our music to be used for various independent films, but we would like to score some major horror films as well.

If you could have created the soundtrack to any film, which one would it have been?

Joseph: A horror movie host by the name of Dr. Gangrene used our Darklore Manor album as a score to the silent film *Nosferatu* and it fit perfectly. If someone did a really dark and serious remake of *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, I think our *Carnival of Lost Souls* CD would work very well. *Dracula* would be cool too, as would anything by Lovecraft. We will eventually be writing an album based on our gothic anthology *Tales From The Dark Tower*, so if we ever turn it into a movie, I guess I'd have to say that would be my favorite film to score.

As you can see, these ghouls have been quite busy over the past few years. I personally cannot wait to see what terrors creep from their minds in the future. Alas, we will all have to wait and see!

